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THE LOCATION OF LA SALLE'S COLONY ON THE GULF OF MEXICO

One of the unsettled points in the history of La Salle's career in America has been the exact location of the colony which he established temporarily on the shores of the gulf of Mexico in 1685. The view held by Parkman and most other writers has been that the site was on the Lavaca river, but from this opinion some have dissented, while others have been in doubt because of the inadequacy of the available data.¹ The question is debatable no longer, for it is settled once for all by newly discovered records in the archives of Spain, which have been corroborated by archeological and topographical investigation.

In order to put this new evidence in its proper setting, it seems desirable to review briefly the main features of the well-known story of La Salle's enterprise. In 1682 La Salle descended the Mississippi to its mouth and conceived the idea of founding there a colony in the name of the king of France. In writing of his purposes, historians generally have laid the chief em-

¹ Parkman writes: "It was on the river which he named La Vache, now the Lavaca, which enters the head of Matagorda Bay" (*La Salle and the discovery of the great West* [Boston, 1910], 391-392). The same view is held by H. H. Bancroft (*North Mexican states and Texas* [San Francisco, 1886], 1:402); G. P. Garrison (*Texas* [Boston, 1903], 22); and R. C. Clark (*The beginnings of Texas* [Austin, 1907], 18). On their maps Garrison and Clark both place the French fort east of the stream. Miss Eleanor Buckley, in a scholarly discussion, concludes that the fort was on Lavaca, but shows, correctly, that it was not on the left bank. (*Texas State Historical Association, Quarterly*, 15:57-60.) W. Kingsford (*The History of Canada* [London, 1888], 2:137-138) concludes that the settlement was probably on Galveston bay and certainly not on Matagorda. For other views see *post*, 179.

phasis upon La Salle's desire to control and develop the valley of the Mississippi, and through that stream to establish connection with Canada. But La Salle had other purposes which were equally or even more prominent in his plans. French explorers in the interior of North America had long dreamed of finding a way to the much-talked-of mines of northern Mexico. France and Spain were continually at war or on the verge of war, and at the very time when La Salle descended the Mississippi French buccaneers were scouring the waters of the gulf and making raids upon the Spanish settlements of Florida. In the course of the next year French corsairs three times sacked the Spanish settlement of Apalache. Thus France and Spain were competing for the control of the northern shores of the gulf of Mexico, and of this competition La Salle's project was a part. When he returned to France, therefore, La Salle proposed to establish a colony on the gulf, not only as a means of controlling the Mississippi valley and the northern gulf shore, but also as a base of attack, in case of war, upon the Spanish treasure fleets and upon the northern provinces of Mexico. These purposes La Salle plainly set forth in his proposals to the king, and on these terms his plans were approved by Louis XIV.²

The colony of some four hundred people left France in the summer of 1684, and in the autumn reached the West Indies, the ketch of *St. François* having been captured by the Spaniards on the way. While in the West Indies La Salle was gravely ill, but he recovered his health and in November continued his voyage. For reasons which have never been fully explained, the mouth of the Mississippi was missed and a landing made near Pass Cavallo, on Matagorda bay.³ Some students have maintained that the passing of the Mississippi was not accidental, but designed by La Salle, in order better to attack the Spanish provinces of Mexico. This view, however, seems unwarranted.⁴

After reaching Matagorda bay the expedition went rapidly to

² See documents in P. Margry, *Découvertes et établissements des français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale, 1614-1698* (Paris, 1878), 2:288-301, 359-369; 3:17-28. Also G. Gravier, *Cavelier de la Salle de Rouen* (Paris, 1871), 96-97.

³ "Relation de Henri Joutel," in Margry, *Découvertes*, 3:91-146.

⁴ For the view that the passing of the Mississippi was by mistake see Parkman, *La Salle and the discovery of the great West*, 376; Gravier, *Cavelier de la Salle de Rouen*, 100; Justin Winsor, *Cartier to Frontenac* (Boston, 1894), 313; Bancroft,

pieces. A landing had scarcely been made when some of the colonists died from sickness and others were killed by the Indians. In the attempt to enter the bay, the *Aimable* was wrecked. Beaujeu, the naval commander, had quarreled with La Salle from the beginning, and from Pass Cavallo he sailed back to France with the *Joly*, carrying away some of the soldiers and a large quantity of much needed supplies. Tonty, La Salle's lieutenant, by agreement descended the Mississippi to meet him at the mouth, but of course did not find him, and therefore gave him no aid.

To make the best of a bad situation, La Salle moved his colony to a better site near the head of Lavaca bay and began a series of expeditions to the eastward in the hope of finding the Mississippi river, which he thought to be near. While engaged in exploring the eastern portion of Matagorda bay, the *Belle*, the last of La Salle's four vessels, was wrecked and left stranded on the inner shoals of Matagorda peninsula.⁵ On his third expedition northeastward La Salle, with a few companions, made his way to the Cenis Indians on the Neches, and to the Nasoni north of Nacogdoches. But here he was forced by desertion and sickness to retrace his steps, and he returned to the settlement at Matagorda bay.⁶ The colony by this time had dwindled down to a mere handful, and succor was imperative or extermination certain. Again the intrepid explorer set forth with a few companions, in an attempt to reach Canada. Crossing the Colorado near Columbus, he made his way to the Brazos, which he passed just above the mouth of the Navasota. Here a quarrel arose among his followers, in the course of which Moranget, La Salle's nephew, was slain by his companions while hunting for supplies which La Salle had cached in the vicinity during the previous expedition.⁷

North Mexican states and Texas, 1:399; Jared Sparks, *Robert Cavelier de la Salle* (Boston, 1844), 130; E. T. Miller, "The connection of Peñalosa with the La Salle expedition," in *Texas State Historical Association, Quarterly*, 5:97-112. For a contrary view see J. G. Shea, *The expedition of Don Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa* (New York, 1882), 22; Charlevoix, *History and general description of New France* (J. G. Shea, tr. — New York, 1866-1872), 4:68-69.

⁵ "Relation de Henri Joutel," in Margry, *Découvertes*, 3:163-226, *passim*.

⁶ J. G. Shea, *Discovery and exploration of the Mississippi valley* (Albany, 1903), 201-205.

⁷ "Relation de Henri Joutel," in Margry, *Découvertes*, 3:260-325.

To save their own necks, when La Salle reached the scene of the murder the conspirators slew him as they had slain Moranget. Historians have supposed that this act was committed near the Trinity or the Neches, but evidence now available makes it quite clear that the spot was between the Brazos and Navasota rivers, and near the present city of Navasota.⁸ To L'Archévêque, at least, poetic justice was meted out in full measure, as the scholar Bandelier has shown. Being picked up by the Spaniards and taken to Monclova, L'Archévêque became a citizen of New Mexico, and, in 1720, a third of the century after the assassination of La Salle, he was killed by the Indian allies of the French, while taking part in a Spanish expedition to Kansas.⁹

From the Navasota river the survivors of La Salle's party continued eastward to the Cenis and Nasoni. Here some deserted, but others, including Joutel and La Salle's brother, Abbé Jean Cavelier, made their way across the Red river to the mouth of the Arkansas,¹⁰ to Tonty's post on the Illinois, and to Canada. From Tonty they concealed the news of the tragedy which had occurred in the wilds of Texas, but he learned the truth through Indians, and in the fall of 1689 made a second voyage down the Mississippi in an effort to rescue the colonists. Crossing Louisiana to the Natchitoches, he ascended the Red river to the Caddo, and then made his way southwest for eighty leagues to the Nouaydiche, a village of Indians living near the Neches. But here, for lack of aid and guides, and, it is said, hearing of the approach of De León, he was forced to give up

⁸ The correctness of this conclusion is clear to any one who reads Joutel's journal in the light of contemporary Spanish sources and of established ethnological data regarding the Hasinai Indians. (See Bolton, "The native tribes about the east Texas missions," in the Texas State Historical Association, *Quarterly*, 11:249-276.) New light on the operations of La Salle on Matagorda bay and during his last journeys is shed by the declaration made before the viceroy in Mexico City by Pedro Muni (Pierre Meusnier), one of the Frenchmen picked up in Texas by De León in 1690. He had been with La Salle on his last expedition and had remained in eastern Texas. Incidentally he confirms by a positive statement the present writer's conclusions, reached some years ago, that La Salle's death occurred on the Brazos (*Espíritu Santo*) river. *Testimonio de Autos en orden á las diligencias y resulta de ellas para la entrada por tierra á los Parages de la Bahia del Espíritu Santo.* Manuscript in archivo general de Indias, Sevilla, estante 61, cajon 6, legajo 21.

⁹ See A. F. A. Bandelier, *The gilded man* (New York, 1873), 299-300.

¹⁰ "Relation de Henri Joutel," in Margry, *Découvertes*, 3:325-436.

the search. Accordingly, he purchased horses from the Indians and returned to Canada.

Meanwhile the little colony on the gulf dwindled down to a mere handful. Many of the people died of smallpox. Finally, early in the year 1689, four years after the colony had landed, most of the survivors were slain by their savage neighbors, the Karankawa Indians. In the course of the next few years five children and four men were picked up in various part of Texas by Spaniards, taken to Mexico, imprisoned, or otherwise disposed of.¹¹ Just a quarter of a century later two of the boys, Jean and Robert Talon, reappeared in Texas as guides of the famous St. Denis, when in 1714 he made his historic journey from Natchitoches to the Rio Grande.¹²

Such in outline is the story of La Salle's unfortunate colony. Much of what we know of it is learned through the records of Spanish expeditions sent out in search of it. News of La Salle's voyage to the Mississippi was acquired through the capture of a French corsair off the coast of Yucatan in September, 1684. Soon Spanish parties were sent forth by land and sea to find and eject the intruders. In 1687 the wrecks of the *Aimable* and the *Belle* were seen by members of two of these expeditions, who took from them four pieces of artillery "and three painted fleurs de lis." They concluded that the French colony had been completely destroyed;¹³ but, to make certain, overland expeditions were sent out from Monterey and Monclova, then the principal outposts on the northeastern frontier of New Spain. The leader of these expeditions was Alonso de León, the ablest frontiersman of his district. In 1686 and again in 1687 he made his way to the Rio Grande and explored it to its mouth, looking for

¹¹ Letter of Alonso de León to the viceroy of Mexico, May 18, 1689, in Buckingham Smith, *Colección de varios documentos para la historia de la Florida* (London, 1857), 25-27; "Interrogations fait à Pierre et Jean Talon," in Margry, *Découvertes*, 3:610-621; Alonso de León, *Historia de Nuevo León*, edited by Genaro García (Mexico, 1909), ch. 34-45.

¹² Manuscript correspondence of St. Denis with the mission authorities of San Juan Bautista, 1714, and of Santa Cruz de Querétaro.

¹³ Cárdenas, *Ensayo cronológico para la historia general de la Florida* (Madrid, 1723), 268, 283; junta de guerra de Yndias, á 22 de marzo de 1691. Acordada el mismo dia. Representa á vuestra magestad lo que se le ofrece en vista del papel que escribio Don Andres de Pez, sobre fortificar la Bahia de Panzacola. Don Antonio Ortiz de Ojalora. c. March 22, 1691. Manuscript in archivo general de Indias, estante 61, cajon 6, legajo 21.

the French. Hearing in 1688 of a strange white man dwelling among the Indians north of the Rio Grande, he crossed it near Eagle Pass and found a lone Frenchman ruling single-handed a large confederacy of savages. The Frenchman was captured by strategem and taken to Mexico; in 1689 he returned as guide to De León, now on his fourth expedition in search of La Salle's colony.¹⁴

Making his way to the northern shores of Lavaca bay, De León found the ruins of the French settlement, rescued from the Indians a few survivors, held a conference with an Indian chief from the Neches river, and returned to Mexico. Next year he was sent on a fifth expedition, instructed to destroy the French fort and to aid Father Massanet in founding missions on the Neches, where it was feared the French might reappear, and where the friars had long dreamed of establishing the faith. The French fort was burned, and the bay was again visited.¹⁵

In the summer of 1690 De León returned to Monclova and reported what he had done. Among other things he stated that in the bay, a short distance from the mouth of the stream on which the French colony had been established, he had seen two buoys which were not there the year before and could hardly have been placed there by the Indians.¹⁶ So serious was the matter regarded that a council of war was held in Mexico to consider it, for it was feared that the buoys might mark the entrance to some channel in which other French vessels were lurking, or to which they might return. It was resolved, therefore, that they should be destroyed; the method of their destruction was left to be determined by the viceroy.¹⁷

¹⁴ Alonso de León, *Historia de Nuevo León*, ch. 34-45; E. Portillo, *Apuntes para la historia antigua de Coahuila y Texas* (Saltillo, 1886), 224-238; Clark, *Beginnings of Texas*, 9-27.

¹⁵ Letter of Damián Massanet to Don Carlos de Sigüenza, in the Texas State Historical Association, *Quarterly*, 2:281-312; Alonso de León, "Itinerary of the expedition made by General Alonso de León, 1689," in *ibid.*, 8:203-224; De León, *Diario of 1690*, manuscript.

¹⁶ De León, *Diario of 1690*, entry for April 26, manuscript; declaration of Gregorio de Salinas, August 19, 1690, manuscript in *Testimonio de autos en orden á las diligencias*.

¹⁷ The *junta general* was held on August 29, 1690. In it were considered De León's reports and certain declarations given in Mexico a few days before. It was stated that since it appears "by the diary that two buoys or anchors have been seen

The viceroy not only desired to learn who had left the buoys, and to protect the bay, but was even more concerned to establish a water route to the missions which had been established on the Neches.¹⁸ In September, therefore, he sent out an expedition to investigate these points. A ship was equipped for three months, provided with a launch and a canoe, manned with sixty soldiers and sailors, and put in charge of Captain Francisco de Llanos, an officer in the West Indian fleet. With him went Gregorio de Salinas, who had been with De León on his last expedition, and who was now put in charge of the land operations.¹⁹ As pilot the viceroy appointed Juan de Triana, an expert in the navigation of the gulf. As master of the fortification and map-maker went Manuel Joseph de Cárdenas y Magaña, who had shown skill in the building of the great prison fortress of San Juan de Ulua, still standing near Vera Cruz. Before coming to Mexico he had served two years in the *presidio* of Cádiz, and one in the West Indian fleet.²⁰

in the mouth of the entrance of the Rio de San Marcos, which is in the bay of Espíritu Santo, and which appear to be a mark for its entrance; and considering in view of all the foregoing proceedings that every mark, demonstration, or sign which might give an indication of the slightest danger ought to be destroyed and removed; this *junta* sees no objection to having this done; but it is resolved that the method and time of the measures necessary for it be reserved to the providence of his excellency, to the end that he may be pleased to give the orders which to him may appear most suited to his zeal." Testimonio de Autos en orden á las diligencias.

¹⁸ In his *decreto* of November 12, 1690, the viceroy, after reviewing the action of the *junta* regarding the removal of the buoys, adds that more potent motives were the report that there were four Frenchmen among the Texas who might have come from New France, or from another settlement nearer; the difficulty and expense of traveling by land six hundred or seven hundred leagues through a hostile country; the knowledge of a large river entering the bay of Espíritu Santo (or San Bernardo) which might pass close to the newly established mission; and it being cheaper and easier to send expeditions from Vera Cruz. (Testimonio de las diligencias ejecutadas para quitar las Boyas ó Valisas en el Lago de San Bernardo, que llaman Bahia del Espíritu Santo. Manuscript in archivo general de Indias, estante 61, cajon 6, legajo 21.) On December 28, 1690, the viceroy wrote that an expedition by sea had seemed necessary as a means of exploring the interior rivers with a view to founding a waterway to the newly established missions, which would be cheaper than the land route. Manuscript in archivo general de Indias, estante 61, cajon 60, legajo 21.

¹⁹ *Decreto* of the viceroy, November 12, 1690. Testimonio de las diligencias ejecutadas para quitar las Boyas.

²⁰ At this time Cárdenas was a soldier and engineer at San Juan de Ulua, where he had worked two years; he had made a special study of mathematics and fortification; his ability as military engineer had been reported to the viceroy by Don Jaime

The instructions provided that the expedition should first proceed to examine the buoys. If it was found that they marked the entrance to some river or channel, that waterway must be explored. But if the channel should lead neither toward the French fort nor toward the Naches missions, its detailed examination should be deferred to a later expedition, "since the present one is directed solely to learning which of the rivers coming from the province of Texas (the Naches country), or passing near it and emptying into this lake, is navigable and crosses the region between that province and the gulf." If such a river should be found, it must be examined minutely, to see if it afforded a port for large vessels, and whether it could be fortified. To report on these last matters was the especial duty of Cárdenas, who was instructed to make a careful map of the entire San Bernardo (Matagorda) bay, its rivers and inlets, and report whether Pass Cavallo could be closed. In case the site of La Salle's colony were to be regarded suitable for fortification, Salinas was to leave there the French cannon which De León had buried at the fort; if not, he should carry them to Vera Cruz.²¹

The Llanos expedition seems hitherto to have been unknown to historians, and yet its records are of first importance in determining the plans of the viceroy regarding Texas, and, incidentally, in fixing the location of La Salle's colony. The records comprise correspondence, a diary, and a carefully made map of Matagorda bay and its tributaries. The map is so accurate that we are able to identify practically every point which Llanos, Salinas, and Cárdenas visited; and there can be no question as to its reliability. It is the work of a skilled and careful engineer.²²

Franck. After his return from the expedition the viceroy wrote Cárdenas a special note of thanks for his services with Llanos. In March, 1791, he was still serving at San Juan de Ulua. At that time he was applying to the king for promotion to the rank of captain of infantry, with employment as an engineer in Havana. The data given above has been gathered from an unlabeled *expediente* in the archivo general de Indias, Sevilla, estante 61, cajon 60, legajo 21.

²¹ Instructions dated September 14, 1690, in *Testimonio de las diligencias egecutadas para quitar las Boyas*.

²² The records of this expedition are contained in the collection of documents entitled "*Testimonio de las diligencias egecutadas para quitar las Boyas 6 Valis*," previously cited. They consist of the *junta* general of August 29; a *decreto* of the



MAP MADE IN 1690, CONTAINING THE ESSENTIAL DATA ON THE CÁRDENAS MAP, BUT WITH DIFFERENT LETTERING

On October 24, Llanos and his party reached Pass Cavallo.²³ To this point the diary recorded the observations made by the pilot, Triana; thenceforth it recorded the joint operations of Llanos, Cárdenas, and Salinas, in which a leading part was played by Cárdenas. His map shows by dots the routes followed in the bay, and by crosses, numbers, and letters, the principal points of interest. The explorations in the coves and rivers were made with the launch and canoes.

On the twenty-seventh the party crossed the bar. On the twenty-eighth they reached the spot where the *Aimable* had gone down (F). Turning northwest, on the thirtieth they reached Sand Point, which was accurately mapped and described.²⁴ On November 1 they entered Lavaca bay in the

viceroy, dated at Mexico, November 12, 1690, reviewing the action of the *junta* and subsequent proceedings; and the diary of the expedition. The diary is entitled "Diario y derrotero del viage que se ha hecho y egecutada á la Bahia de San Bernardo, que comunmente llaman del Espíritu Santo, el Capitan Don Francisco de Llanos, por mandado y de orden del Excelentísimo Señor Conde de Galve, Virrey, Gobernador y Capitan General de este Reino de Nueva España, y Presidente de la Real Audiencia de ella, este presente año de mil seiscientos y noventa."

Another copy of the diary, somewhat abbreviated, but also containing some additions, is included in the *expediente* cited in note 20 as containing Cárdenas' application for promotion. This copy is entitled: "Diario de la Derrota que han hecho para la Bahía de San Bernardo por orden del Excelentísimo Señor Conde de Galve, virrey y capitán general de la Nueva España, el capitán de mar y guerra Don Francisco de Llanos, el Capitan Don Gregorio Salinas, y Don Manuel de Cardenas, en la fragata mombrada Nuestra Señora de la Encarnacion, sacado por dicho Don Manuel, año de 1690."

The longer diary is signed by Don Manuel Joseph de Cardenas y Magnaña, Don Francisco de Llanos, Francisco Millan de Tapia, and Don Gregorio de Salinas Barona. It is written in the first person, as if by Llanos. The map is entitled "Planta cosmografica del Lago de San Bernardo Con los senos y Ríos que á el se comunican descubiertos por horden del Exmo Señor Conde de Galve V^o Gor y Capn G^o desta N^a España obserbada y delineada por Dn Manuel Joseph de Cardenas Aficdo A las Matas Ao de 1691."

The vessel in which the expedition was made was the *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación*. The expedition left Vera Cruz on October 12. Nothing noteworthy occurred until the seventeenth, when they passed the mouth of the Río Bravo

²³ The following summary of the exploration is taken from the diaries for the dates indicated here. Since the photograph of the Cárdenas map is not clear, there has been reproduced a small map of the same region from the official map of De León's expedition of 1690 (described, *post*).

²⁴ The following description of Sand Point is given in the diary: "It has a reef of sand which extends from the windward point to the southeast [southwest] and crosses almost the entire entrance, leaving a channel on the western side,* for which reason this entry has not been found in five expeditions which up to now have been

launch, and named it Todos Santos (All Saints) in honor of the day. Proceeding to the northwestern corner of Lavaca bay, they reached the place where the buoys had been reported (2). They proved to be only logs of driftwood.

Continuing northward, Llanos and his party entered the mouth of the river flowing into the bay at its northwestern angle, obviously the Garcitas. This stream was given the name of Rio de los Franceses, or river of the French. The words of the diary are interesting here. It says: "We continued up the river until we arrived at a little village of Indians whom we did not understand and who did not understand us. From here we continued up the river till we saw some houses,²⁵ on the highest elevation. Proceeding toward them, we landed on the banks and discovered that they were the settlement and fort of M. de la Salle [Munsuir de Salas], from many signs which we found there, such as wheels of cannon carriages, musket breeches, and many burned planks and beams of the fort."²⁶ De León had burned the fortification a few months before. Another report tells us that the French settlement was two leagues or about five miles up the river. At night Cárdenas and his party returned to the vessel near Sand Point. Before morning a storm arose which prevented any work of exploration on the following day.

On the fourth the party went north again in the launch and entered the bay where Port Lavaca now stands. From there they went to the inlet now called Chocolate bay, and explored it with the canoe. Cárdenas guessed that it might be the mouth of the Medina river, which had been crossed by De León in the sent to explore this lake.*" Diario de la Derrota que han hecho para la Bahia de San Bernardo, entry for November 1. The words between stars are not in the other version.

²⁵ The word is *buxios*.

²⁶ Diario y derrota del viage que se ha egecutada á la Bahia de San Bernardo. The Diario de la Derrota states that after leaving the Indian village, "we continued up the river until we came to some houses on a site the most commanding of that prairie, which, we inferred, from their form, were not Indian houses. We disembarked and, climbing up the bank, we came to the settlement of de la Salle, at point L [*just above S on map published*] where there was a wall of a fortification, or platform, and about ten or twelve houses [*buxios*], besides as many already destroyed." The Diario de la Derrota says: "From there we continued to the pueblo of the French, and examined the artillery which was buried there, which consists of eight cannons and two swivel-guns of cast iron, new and in good condition."

interior; but he was careful to state that this was only a guess.

Next day they continued up the west coast to the mouth of Placedo creek, which they ascended for a league in the canoe, thinking it might be the Guadalupe river. Returning they examined again the two logs of driftwood, and for a second time entered the Garcitás river. Says the diary: "We found the place where the artillery of the fort was said to be, and we uncovered it in order to see it and satisfy ourselves. We saw that it was of iron. Then we passed on, and, following up the said river, we camped for the night at point P." (x on map published.) This point was some three or more miles above the fort, and not far from the present residence of Mr. Claude Keeran. Next day they continued up the river till the water was too shallow for the launch, but evidently they did not reach the mouth of Arenosa creek, for no mention is made of such a stream. Descending, they spent the night in the bay near the mouth of the river of the French.

At another point the diary gives further data regarding this stream and the French settlement. It says: "The width of the river is sixty yards at the entry. It is eighteen or twenty palms deep, but at places decreases to eight palms, at some of the fords. Its whole bottom is of mud; after three leagues up it contains some groves of oaks, liveoaks, and some wild grapes and willows.

"As to the site [*of the French settlement*], it is on the highest point of the plain. It overlooks two-thirds of it in the direction of the river, and one-third is a level extending indefinitely northwest. As to the materials, the land is black, rich, and sticky. The river is of fresh water; the timber, of which there is some, is a little distant. There are no stones even to supply needs."

Next day the party raised the drift logs, cut off some pieces, and loaded them on the launch to take to the ship and to Vera Cruz. Continuing their exploration, they crossed the head of Lavaca bay to another river, coming in at the northeastern angle on the bay. Ascending this stream next day for some five or six miles, they camped for the night (at the point marked 3 on the map). Next day they passed a village of Indians, and shortly afterward the mouth of the river coming from the northwest (4), which they recognized as the one that De León had called

the San Marcos. It was obviously the Lavaca. Ascending the east fork (the Navidad), which on his map Cárdenas called Rio del Espíritu Santo,²⁷ they rowed a few miles, but were stopped by a raft of drift-logs. The river was described as being well timbered, which was not true of the river of the French.

Turning about they camped some two miles above the junction on an elevation (6) described as a red bluff, admirably adapted to fortification and settlement. This spot was clearly the place where the village of Red Bluff now stands.

Next day, the ninth, they descended the river, and explored the small bay or lagoon above the delta (2). On the tenth they explored Cox's bay, next below (8), and on the eleventh Keller's bay (9). From here they returned to the western shore of Lavaca bay, where they camped opposite Sand Point (below T and N).

"There," says the diary, "we found the place where M. de la Salle [Munsuir de Sales] had made the barracks to lodge his men and all the rest of his train, in order thence to conduct them to his settlement. It is inferred, therefore, that his vessels did not go beyond this point — there being insufficient water — whence he conducted all that he had in launches and canoes."

On the twelfth the party began the exploration of the main bay, to the east. Coursing along the north shore, they passed the mouth of Carancahua bay (11) and camped some distance east of it under the shelter of a red cliff and a gunshot from a spring of fresh water. This place, which was apparently near Well Point, can perhaps be identified by residents of the locality. Next day they continued eastward to Trespalacios bay, returned, rounded Half-moon Point and proceeded east.

On the fifteenth they entered a small inlet, and then continued east to a lagoon (15, 16) at the mouth of a large river which formed a delta. This stream was clearly the Colorado. Cárdenas called it the Trinidad, no doubt thinking it was the stream bearing that name which De León had crossed in the interior.

²⁷ In the De León diary of the 1690 expedition to the Hasinai country, the Colorado was called the San Marcos and the Brazos was called the Espíritu Santo. It was evidently supposed by Cárdenas that the two rivers joined here to form the Lavaca. Below it will be seen that the mouth of the Colorado was called by Cárdenas the Trinidad, the name given by De León in 1690 to the middle Trinity.

On the sixteenth they ascended the eastern mouth of the river some ten or fifteen miles to a point (18) near Beadle, and returned by the westernmost channel till stopped by a raft of drift logs, whence they turned back, descending by another channel. Continuing eastward up Matagorda bay for a short distance on the seventeenth, they then turned back, coasting Matagorda peninsula, looking for an outlet to the gulf, and crossed to the west side of the bay, where they camped near Point Connor (25).

With this camp as a base, several days were spent in exploring and sounding the channel. While here a soldier died and his body was thrown into the bay. Finally, on the twenty-ninth, they crossed the bar into the gulf, and set sail for Vera Cruz, which they reached on the ninth of December, after an absence of fifty-nine days.

Anyone who will take the trouble to compare a modern map with that made by Cárdenas will be struck by the accuracy of the latter, and will be filled with admiration for the engineer's skill. His merit was recognized by the officials in Mexico, and on his return to Vera Cruz he received the special thanks of the viceroy for his notable work.

The bearing of the Cárdenas report and map upon the location of La Salle's colony is obvious. They simply settle the matter once for all and without argument. The settlement was on the Garcitas river and not on the Lavaca, as has been supposed. This I realized as soon as I studied the map, as must everyone conversant with the conditions of the problem. But I had the curiosity to see the locality, to test more minutely the work of Cárdenas, and, although the proof in no way depended upon this confirmation, to see if perchance the site of the colony was still marked by archeological remains and was known to local tradition.²⁸

Accordingly, on July 3, 1914, I left Austin for the Garcitas river. Going next day from San Antonio by the Southern Pacific railroad, and passing on the way gatherings of people participating in barbecues and other holiday activities, about 1 P. M. I stopped at Placedo station, having before me the prospect of taking the midnight train to Ben West, some fifteen miles east on the Brownsville road, and on the Garcitas river, there

²⁸ Especially in view of the opinion expressed by General J. S. Clark, *post*, 179.

to wait for daylight and the assistance of the local inhabitants. But a little inquiry at Placedo made it clear to me that the place which I was seeking was on Keeran ranch, and that I must see Mr. Claude Keeran, owner of the ranch and a lifelong resident of the place. I made bold, therefore, to call him up by telephone, introduce myself, and tell him of my errand. He was interested at once, and generously volunteered to coöperate. At his suggestion I rode out seven miles that night in a wagon with Mr. Vickers, who was boring a well on the Keeran ranch, spending the night in the camp as Mr. Vicker's guest. Next morning as we were eating breakfast, Mr. Keeran, accompanied by his foreman, Mr. Charles Webb, came in his automobile, and together we spent the forenoon going over Cárdenas' ground, with copies of his map and the accompanying report in hand.

Conversation at Placedo with Mr. J. S. Webb, who for years had ridden the Keeran ranch, had elicited the fact that on a bank overlooking the Garcitas river were ruins known in the neighborhood tradition as "The Old Mission," but otherwise unexplained. Mr. Keeran confirmed this report, took me to the spot, and informed me that, like most "old sites" in the Southwest, it has long been an object of attention to treasure seekers. It is exactly where Cárdenas' map shows La Salle's settlement, on the west bank of the Garcitas river, about five miles above its mouth, and on the highest point of the cliff-like bank of that stream. The place is between Malden Mott and Letts's Mott, but considerably nearer the former than the latter. The spot is the vantage point of all the country round. To the south, west, and northwest, stretch indefinitely the great level prairies, now sprinkled with a recent growth of mesquite, but in La Salle's day an open prairie dotted with buffalo herds. In front lies a beautiful little valley through which winds the Garcitas river, a good sized stream, from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet in width, and still navigable with a launch for a number of miles above its mouth.²⁹ On the other side the valley is hemmed in by a range of low hills which, off to the northwest, fade away into the great plain lying east of Victoria. The choice by La Salle of the spot for his colony is no cause for sur-

²⁹ Mr. Keeran runs a launch on the river, his landing being a mile or more above the site of the fort.

prise. A careful comparison of the topography of the valley with Cárdenas' map and description showed that he had delineated correctly every important bend in the stream, and had even placed on his map west of the river and below the French fort the small lagoon now known as Red Fish lake.

The archeological remains of the settlement, so far as we ascertained, are not extensive, but they are palpable and of certain character. Before we went to the site Mr. Keeran stated that years ago there were distinct remains of an ancient wall, but feared they had entirely disappeared. But he was mistaken in this, for we easily found the wall, then just visible above the surface of the ground, and without any digging were able to trace it for many feet. The wall is made of large, red, adobe-like blocks, apparently of baked red clay. Subsequently Mr. Keeran has found it to be two and a half feet thick and to inclose an area ninety feet square.³⁰ From the surface of the ground I gathered a handful of small fragments of antique blue and white porcelain. The story of the finding of the "vases," which made its way into the daily press, is a pure fiction of the reporter, for which I am in no way responsible. Mr. Keeran told me, with full circumstantial details, of the unearthing on the spot, some thirty years ago, of half of an immense copper kettle, nearly a yard in diameter. It was exhumed at dead of night by a party of treasure hunters, who were working under the direction of a fortune teller and were frightened away by uncanny sounds. Mr. Keeran states that the kettle remained neglected on the site for several years and then disappeared.

It is interesting now to note that heretofore several students have independently concluded that the La Salle colony was on the Garcitas and not on the Lavaca, but have lacked sufficient data to give acceptance to their findings. Twenty or more years ago General J. S. Clark, on the basis of the archeological and topographical data, expressed the belief that the site was on an elevation on the west bank of the Garcitas, about five miles above its mouth, where he found the remains of an ancient settlement. The spot was doubtless the same as that which Mr. Keeran and I examined. Clark's opinion was mentioned by

³⁰ Letter from Mr. C. A. Keeran, August 26, 1914. He writes me that in addition he found a carving fork, crockery, pottery, a bullet, spikes, and a coal pit.

Justin Winsor, but dismissed as inconclusive.³¹ About seven years ago C. C. Small, one of my students in the University of Texas, on the basis of Joutel's journal and such Spanish documents as were then available, reached a similar conclusion, though he attempted no topographical or archeological confirmation. Subsequently both his and General Clark's conclusions were rejected by another student of mine in the University of Texas.³² Finally, Miss Florence B. Stanton, one of my students in the University of California, in the light of the new data, independently reached the conclusion to which I had already come, both with regard to La Salle's death-place and to the site of his colony.³³

Now that we are on certain ground, we find plenty of confirmatory evidence. The Sigüenza map of De León's expedition of 1689,³⁴ which has long been known and has been published, gives a somewhat crude delineation of Lavaca bay in general, but shows with reasonable correctness the western shore and its inlets, which De León visited, and places the French fort on a stream which corresponds clearly with Garcitas river. At the same time that I secured the Cárdenas map, I for the first time obtained a copy of the official map of De León's expedition of 1690.³⁵ This contains a small outline map of Matagorda bay

³¹ "General J. S. Clark, a recent investigator of the topographical features of the region, is confident that the camp first occupied was on Mission Bay, near the Espiritu Santo Bay, and that the Fort St. Louis was on the Garcitas River five miles above its junction with Lavaca Bay, while the adjacent river of that name has usually been considered the site of the fort. General Clark represents that the ground of his supposed site still bore, at a recent day, remains of the fort, and was marked by other relics. To most inquirers the evidence has been sufficient that the vicinity of Matagorda Bay — and Espiritu Santo is not far off — was the scene of these fearful experiences." Winsor, *Cartier to Frontenac*, 317.

³² Eleanor Claire Buckley, "The Aguayo expedition into Texas and Louisiana, 1719-1722," in the Texas State Historical Association, *Quarterly*, 15:59-60.

³³ "La Salle's colony in Texas." Manuscript thesis.

³⁴ Camino que el año de 1689 hizo el Gobernador Alonso de Leon desde Cuahuila hasta hallar cerca del Lago de Sn Bernardo el lugar donde havian poblado los Franceses. Sigüenza 1689. Published by Elizabeth Howard West in the Texas State Historical Association, *Quarterly*, 8: facing p. 199.

³⁵ Viage que el año de 1690 hizo el Gobernador Alonso de Leon desde Cuahuila hasta la CAROLINA, Provincia habitada de Texas y otras naciones al Nordeste de la Nueva España. Manuscript in archivo general de Indias, estante 61, cajon 6, legajo 88. There are indications that this map, like that of the 1689 expedition, may have been executed by Sigüenza.

which is quite as accurate in general as the Cárdenas map, and shows the Garcitas and Lavaca rivers coming in at the head of Lavaca bay. On the Garcitas, just where Cárdenas puts it, is shown the "Pueblo de los Franceses." Manifestly this map contains data secured by the Llanos expedition.

One of the tests of a scientific hypothesis is whether it is contradicted by or harmonizes with individual phenomena. As might be expected, the substitution of truth for error on this fundamental point of the location of La Salle's fort dispels several other difficulties which have arisen regarding early expeditions in Texas. The San Marcos river described by De León as from three to six leagues east of "the River of the French," has been taken by students to be the Colorado, a stream which in fact is a good fifty miles away.³⁶ The San Marcos referred to was obviously the Lavaca, as shown on Cárdenas' map. Starting with the Lavaca as the site of the French fort, Joutel's report of La Salle's last expedition to the eastward raises difficulties regarding the streams at every part of his journey. But with a correct start his itinerary is easy to follow. Starting too far east, students have come out too far east in locating the place where La Salle was murdered, placing it on the Neches or the Trinity, instead of on the Brazos.

One point further remains to be dealt with, lest misunderstandings creep in. For two or three years after the destruction of La Salle's colony its site was frequently visited and was temporarily occupied by the Spaniards, as a base of operations in the interior of Texas. Later on, in 1722, it became the site of what was intended to be a permanent Spanish settlement. A fort was built by Aguayo square on the site of the one which had been erected by La Salle. We are sure of this, because in digging the trenches Aguayo's men unearthed numerous remains of the French establishment.³⁷ The Spanish fort was given the name of Nuestra Señora de Loreto. Across the river was established the mission of Espíritu Santo. Four years later the fort and mission were moved northwest to Mission Valley,

³⁶ Bancroft, *History of the north Mexican states*, 1:400.

³⁷ "On the sixth of April his lordship began to draw the lines for the erection of the *presidio*, as the king our lord (God preserve him), had ordered, in the place where the French, under command of M. de la Salle [Monseur la Sala], had it con-

near the present Victoria, and in 1749 were transferred to the San Antonio river, to become the nucleus of the present city of Goliad. Thus, the relics on the banks of the Garcitas mark the site of both La Salle's colony and the Spanish *presidio* of Loretto. The walls still visible are probably the remains of the Spanish rather than of the French fortification.

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structed, from the year of 'eighty-four until that of 'ninety, when the Indians destroyed them, there remaining alive in their power three Frenchmen and a girl. They buried the artillery (which later the Spaniards secured, and took to Vera Cruz), the excavation, which is within the place where the *presidio* has been placed, being visible today, as is also that in which they burned the powder; and on opening the trenches for the fortification there were found nails, pieces of musket-locks, and fragments of other things which the French use.'' Juan Antonio de la Peña, *Derrotero de la expedición en la provincia de los Texas* (Mexico, 1722), f. 27.